



“RENEWING *the* PROMISE *of* SYRACUSE”

A 50 Point Plan for a 21st Century City

the PLAN

As Mayor, I will strive to improve the quality of life in the City of Syracuse by developing and implementing progressive policies steeped in innovation, transparency, community engagement, and a zeal for bold, equitable leadership that provides 21st Century responses to Syracuse's 21st Century challenges and opportunities.

My 50 Point Plan will cover six major policy areas: Economic Development and Job Creation, Education and Youth, Public Safety, Sustainability and the Environment, Community Development, Housing, and Neighborhoods, and Government Modernization and Efficiency. Within each of these six areas I will outline broad goals and the specific strategies which collectively will create a critical mass of public action. This outline will provide clarity to city government that will bring transparency for our citizens, predictability for business people, and a cohesive plan of action that will drive the operations of a united city workforce toward a cogent vision. The policy strategies found herein will also pull from best practices found in cities around the country and around the world. These areas provide the framework for a platform that will usher in an era of innovation and vigor in city government.

While setting goals and defining strategies that will bring about the change our community so desperately needs, the links between these policy areas will also be clearly illustrated. Focused solutions and targeted actions in each area will be imperative to achieve significant results, but it is this holistic and integrated approach to governance that will bring about synergistic impacts and lasting change. Throughout this document you will find an emphasis on coordination within city government that gets departments and their personnel out of their traditional silos and into a more dynamic and creative atmosphere. This atmosphere will be the engine that creates efficiencies in the government and generates multi-disciplinary solutions to meet the complex problems our city faces.

Section One

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT *and* JOB CREATION

Section Two

EDUCATION *and* YOUTH

Section Three

PUBLIC SAFETY

Section Four

**COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING *and*
NEIGHBORHOODS**

Section Five

SUSTAINABILITY *and* the ENVIRONMENT

Section Six

**GOVERNMENT MODERNIZATION *and*
EFFICIENCY**



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FOR MAYOR

Section Four

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING *and* NEIGHBORHOODS

Syracuse's greatest assets are its neighborhoods and the people that live in them. Our neighborhoods reflect the character of a friendly, hard working, gritty and compassionate community spirit. We have built a city on the shoulders of our blue-collar ancestors that helped build a canal and spark an industrial revolution. We have weathered storms together, never hesitating to help a neighbor dig their car out of a snow bank or offer assistance to a friend without power. The laughter of children has echoed around our schools and parks for generations. Syracuse has the magnetism of a big city and the charm of a small town.

We must do all we can to maintain, strengthen and market these incredible assets. Our city government needs to make creating and sustaining a high quality of life in Syracuse the overarching goal of its operations.

The challenges are real. We have seen houses go vacant and historic properties get torn down. We have seen violent crimes shatter families and schools deteriorate. We have seen litter accumulate in our streets and highways that divide and isolate communities. We know the toll that these problems have taken in our community, and we know the threat they pose to the quality of life in our city and our prospects for success.

We must take clear steps to combat these problems in systematic ways. We need to develop a citywide housing strategy that clearly lays out principles and policies that will maximize public investment and add the greatest value to the city as a whole. We need strategies that places an emphasis on leveraging local, state and federal funding, balancing our investments between low, moderate and market-rate options, and provides leadership and coordination for our housing agencies. With finite resources and a shrinking population it is critical for us to carefully target our investments to turn struggling neighborhoods around and shore up those neighborhoods that are beginning to waver.

We also need to make the cleanliness and beautification of our neighborhoods and public spaces a true priority. How can we expect visitors to our community to see a vibrant and proud community when trash litters our downtown and highway off ramps? We must pull together a concerted effort bringing together government, private business, neighborhood organizations and residents to clean up parts of our city that are most visible and in most need of some attention.

While strengthening our neighborhoods we must also foster stronger connectivity between them. Visitors to Syracuse I speak with often note the stark contrasts that exist between different neighborhoods, even from one block to the next. Building on past investments by targeting transitional areas and by promoting connectivity will be crucial in creating greater consistency in quality housing stock and good neighborhood aesthetics. The I-81 challenge will present an incredible opportunity to promote this kind of connectivity and reverse the trends of separation and isolation of our community.

Concurrently we must work to lift our struggling communities out of poverty. In Syracuse, as in much of the nation, we have populations that have experienced multigenerational poverty that has had myriad consequences for our children, families and community as a whole. While exciting community revitalization efforts are taking place, such as the Near Westside Initiative and the Prospect Hill Redevelopment Plan, the city government must do more to combat the rooted, concentrated poverty that exists in many of our neighborhoods.

Truly, there is little work more important than revitalizing the lifeblood of our city and region – our neighborhoods.



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COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, HOUSING *and* NEIGHBORHOODS

GOALS

- **Beautify our City.**
- **Create a city full of interesting places where people want to do business, make a home, and spend time.**
- **Develop and implement housing policies that strengthen Syracuse's neighborhoods.**
- **Bolster our arts and culture institutions.**
- **Improve the physical, psychological and cultural connectivity of our city.**
- **Take steps to improve the public health.**
- **Instill a sense of civic ownership in our city.**
- **Make preservation a priority in Syracuse.**
- **Promote accessible, quality open spaces.**

STRATEGY #23

Actively engage, and promote full community involvement in, the discussion surrounding the I-81 question.

STRATEGY #24

Create a Planning Office that can provide the kind of cross-departmental, interdisciplinary coordination of effort and resources that City government so urgently needs to capitalize on catalytic revitalization efforts.

STRATEGY #25

Make civic engagement a critical component of all city operations.

STRATEGY #26

Immediately begin working with housing agencies and our neighborhoods to develop a housing plan that articulates our principles and priorities regarding housing in order to properly guide funding and planning for housing efforts in the City of Syracuse.

STRATEGY #27

Develop progressive zoning policies that place an emphasis on walkability, mixed-use, quality place-creation and strong urban design.



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STRATEGY #28

Develop a proactive approach to preservation that identifies historic properties before development or demolition is proposed in order to create clarity for property owners and members of the community while safeguarding our invaluable architectural assets.

STRATEGY #29

Work with local agencies and institutions to fully market our neighborhoods, recreational assets, entertainment venues, and arts and cultural institutions.

STRATEGY #30

Develop a program that involves city departments, public entities, private companies, and citizens to clean up and beautify key locations in our city.

STRATEGY #31

Revamp the Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today (TNT) program to reflect a higher level of civic engagement and increase ownership by residents of our city government.

STRATEGY #32

Pursue innovative options for improving our parks and public spaces and providing more robust recreational offerings.

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GOALS

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STRATEGY #23

Actively engage, and promote full community involvement in, the discussion surrounding the I-81 question.

Interstate Route 81 has been one of the most influential pieces of infrastructure in our city's history. A classic example of

bureaucratic disorganization and poor planning, this interstate was laid down the middle of our city in the 1950's, 60's and 70's with little input from local stakeholders.

A hallmark project of the post-World War II era, this highway facilitated urban sprawl and obliterated the city's 15th Ward. The outflow of population from the urban core and the decimation and isolation of our Southside community has had lasting effects. The separation of the University Hill area from downtown and the Southside has limited the growth of the university and health care institutions on the Hill, prevented downtown and the Southside from benefiting from the success of the Hill institutions and has created economic, psychological and cultural barriers that have hurt our community's connectivity and cohesiveness. The elevated viaduct that passes through our downtown has other significant effects including a blighting influence that hurts the attractiveness of our city, a negative impact on air quality in the urban core, and an obstruction to an area with considerable economic development potential.

As the age of this infrastructure brings its useful life to an end, we must not allow the mistakes of the past to be repeated. As Mayor I will ensure that the voices of the residents of this city are heard. By working closely with the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTTC) I will endeavor to find progressive solutions to this transportation challenge. I believe that by working with the SMTTC and community stakeholders including the Onondaga Citizens League, the University Hill Corporation, the MDA and the many neighborhood groups and residents throughout the city we will find that we can achieve a shared vision – a city without an elevated highway.



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As Mayor I will directly engage the involved agencies including the New York State Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Authority in order to guarantee that our voices are heard and that we reach a solution for our city that realizes the social, environmental, aesthetic and economic development potential we know our central holds.

STRATEGY #24

Create a Planning Office that can provide the kind of cross-departmental, interdisciplinary coordination of effort and resources that City government so urgently needs to capitalize on catalytic revitalization efforts.

There is an old proverb that asserts, “He who fails to plan, plans to fail.” This is true of cities. Cities across the nation and across the world administer planning offices and functions that act as mechanisms for articulating a vision, guiding operations and improving coordination and efficiency.

Also true of some cities is that when financial times get tough planning is one of the first functions to get cut loose. This has been true of Syracuse, and it has been to our detriment. Few functions have the power to improve government efficiency and maximize finite resources the way that effective planning does. With a competent, professional planning staff city government will reach a higher level of coordination and capacity. With city planners we can set goals, coordinate operations and budget effectively across city departments. Without personnel who focus on coordination of services, quality urban design, preservation of invaluable community resources, the creation of exciting urban places and targeting public investment to maximize impact we can not achieve the level of success that we seek. With the many exciting initiatives being undertaken in our community like the Westside Initiative and the Prospect Hill Redevelopment Plan we must leverage these investments for catalytic results.

We are all aware of the many high quality plans that have been done in our community over the years including the SUNY-ESF components to the City Comprehensive Plan, the Southeast Gateway Plan, the Westcott Street Renaissance Plan, the Botanical Garden Plan and many others. It is time that we activate these plans and tie them to a unified vision and rationale for current and future planning efforts.

As Mayor I intend to reinstitute a city planning office. The focus of this office will be to bring a new rationale to all city services as coordinated, well articulated actions clearly aligned with broad goals and strategies. This will bring a new level of transparency to city government as we heighten awareness of civic activity and lay out coherent processes for government activity.

This office will work collaboratively with the Syracuse-Onondaga County Planning Agency (SOCPA), the MDA, the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council (SMTC), the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board and other agencies involved in planning and revitalization efforts to achieve integrated planning and strategic project investment. It is time that we place city decision-making on the solid footing of sound planning. As Mayor I will begin the task of reestablishing the staff infrastructure to achieve this ideal.

STRATEGY #25

Make civic engagement a critical component of all city operations.

Fundamentally, a local government should belong to the people. The city government should reflect a higher level of transparency and direct citizen engagement.



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Our city is home to pioneering organizations who have long advocated citizen engagement like FOCUS Greater Syracuse and the Onondaga Citizens League. These organizations are also recognizing the leadership example of President Obama who has mandated citizen participation as part of all federal agency operations. We must work in partnership with local organizations as well as with individual citizens to create a more accountable government whose operations are more directly affected by citizen input.

I intend to revamp the city's TNT (Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today) citizen participation program and develop a clearer, more interactive and user-friendly city website in order to achieve this goal. I also intend to explore ways that public meetings, such as Common Council meetings, can be made more accessible by web or local access television broadcast. All of these efforts will be geared towards making the operations of each department more accountable to the public and more closely tied to citizens' needs and desires for the future.

These efforts will help to build public trust and increase civic awareness and engagement. A more educated and engaged citizenry can only lead to better government and better community outcomes.

STRATEGY #26

Immediately begin working with housing agencies and our neighborhoods to develop a housing plan and policies that articulate our principles and priorities regarding housing in order to properly guide funding and planning for housing efforts in the City of Syracuse.

Quality housing stock and housing options are critical to vibrant and successful neighborhoods and cities. For older, shrinking cities like Syracuse we face significant challenges in dealing with the harsh realities of market forces. Many of our older neighborhoods,

once home to proud and elegant houses of varying architectural type and character, are now dealing with abandonment, deferred maintenance and slum landlords

Fortunately, we have the expertise and capacity here locally to continue making strides in fighting these forces. Through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program, the HOME program and other state and federal housing fund programs we are able to work in concert with local housing not-for-profit agencies to invest in our struggling neighborhoods.

However, new approaches are needed to more effectively coordinate housing efforts in the city. First the city must have a comprehensive and clearly articulated housing plan for the city. As it stands there is no guiding document or set of principles or priorities that direct how housing funds are spent. We are fortunate to have many active housing partners in Syracuse including Home Headquarters, Syracuse Model Neighborhood Corporation, Jubilee Homes, the Southeast gateway CDC, the Northeast Hawley Development Association, Housing Visions Unlimited, Empire Housing, and Christopher Communities. However, the city must provide strong leadership in coordinating how housing dollars are deployed in the community. The city should not place the responsibility to perform sound neighborhood planning solely on the housing agencies. The Mayor must provide the vision and direction for how housing efforts can be coordinated to create catalytic neighborhood impacts.

We must also focus on leveraging the investments that we and our housing partners make with our limited resources. When we spend public funds on housing projects we should focus on better leveraging those funds with revolving loans and other financial



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implements rather than one-time expenditures. Using such tools to prolong the availability of capital for housing projects will help to stretch the funds further and maximize the neighborhood impact.

While many of our federally and state funded housing programs focus on affordable housing it is also important to provide a balanced housing plan that provides quality affordable housing as well as funding to help stabilize transitional neighborhoods and to help reinforce our thriving neighborhoods. A balanced housing strategy will have a profound effect on the overall health of our housing stock, our neighborhoods and their marketability.

We also need to look at new models for dealing with vacant and abandoned properties in the city. The city currently has in excess of 1400 vacant houses. Vacant properties drag down surrounding property values and create blight that often leads to crime, vandalism and other social ills. We need a tool that will allow government forces to take control of abandoned properties in order to take a more significant role in neighborhood revitalization. A tool that may be able to serve this purpose is a land bank. Land bank authorities have been put into use in other parts of the country including Genesee County, Michigan which is home to the City of Flint. Land banks are public authorities that have the ability to work with county and municipal governments to take control of vacant properties through tax foreclosure. Once properties are under the control of this authority they could then be mothballed, demolished, rehabilitated, sold on the private market or otherwise be incorporated into neighborhood planning and revitalization efforts. The City of Syracuse, Onondaga County and the MDA have already been exploring how such an authority could be implemented here. This model could serve as a very powerful tool for planning, more sustainable tax collection in the long term and higher impact neighborhood and metropolitan revitalization efforts.

Certainly, a comprehensive and clearly articulated plan for housing that places an emphasis on coordinated leadership and

strategic, targeted investment and innovative solutions will have the greatest positive impact on our city's housing stock and our neighborhoods.

STRATEGY #27

Develop progressive zoning policies that place an emphasis on walkability, mixed-use, quality place-creation and strong urban design.

A city's zoning regulations serve as the blueprint for how development takes shape and creates a sense of place. The City of Syracuse zoning code is decades old. This has led to frequent variances from the code and to repeated conflicts between city and county administration, business people and the community.

Now that the City has completed a draft land use plan and design guidelines and standards we should begin to examine how these new plans can be reviewed and implemented. New zoning codes and design guidelines that create a clearer vision for the city and are prepared to handle development in our city including the University Hill area, downtown, our neighborhood commercial corridors and the Lakefront district will remove the ambiguity from the planning and approval processes. Zoning and design plans that strike a balance between market forces and community desires can help to create places in our city where people want to live, work and do business. We need clearer and more progressive zoning regulations that place an emphasis on walkability, mixed uses, sustainable development and quality urban design that engenders unique and exciting places. Zoning is an incredibly powerful tool that we must use to provide greater clarity for business people and residents as we begin moving the city towards a more prosperous future.



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STRATEGY #28

Develop a proactive approach to preservation that identifies historic properties before development or demolition is proposed in order to create clarity for property owners and members of the community while safeguarding our invaluable architectural assets.

As an older northeast city which has been home to renowned architects like Archimedes Russell and Ward Wellington Ward Syracuse has a rich architectural history. Many of our older buildings offer a view into our local and national heritage while also representing a unique and often desirable market niche that can not be replicated by new construction. Successful communities around the world have found ways to leverage these assets for healthier, more vibrant neighborhoods and business areas. Syracuse must also place an emphasis on historic preservation that protects our architectural heritage while reinforcing the incredible value that historic properties have as unique, marketable assets.

While preserving severely struggling structures is not always the most reasonable and beneficial path, preservation should be the norm rather than the exception. We must also take advantage of opportunities to make preservation more affordable. The recent passage of the expanded State Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit is a tremendous example of the resources that are now being made available to facilitate historic preservation and economic development activities around the state. If we can effectively market this and other programs we can help make projects that are more sensitive to our historic assets more feasible.

It is also incredibly important for us to make the system more conducive to effective preservation and planning principles. Having an historic designation process that is proactive rather than reactive, establishing guidelines for designated properties that are clear and well communicated, and placing preservation within a larger

context of city planning and neighborhood revitalization can help us develop a more effective policy for our historic architectural resources and urban fabric.

STRATEGY #29

Work with local agencies and institutions to fully market our neighborhoods, recreational assets, entertainment venues, and arts and cultural institutions.

Some of our greatest community assets are often unknown to many people in and around the City of Syracuse. Our city holds a treasure trove of recreational, entertainment and arts and cultural resources that are currently under-marketed and often under-utilized. Places like the Rosamond Gifford Zoo at Burnet Park, the Everson Museum, Alliance Bank Stadium, the Museum of Science and Technology (MOST), Syracuse Stage, Jazz Central, the Delevan Art Gallery, the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra, the Onondaga County War Memorial and the OnCenter Complex are just some of the top flight venues and organizations that exist right in or near our urban core.

The hard part has already been accomplished in many parts of our community – these many quality places have been established and are successful. Now we must do a better job of marketing ourselves. Marketing efforts have been embarked on by most if not all of these many organizations. What we need is coordinated marketing that centralizes access to the wide array of different recreational, entertainment and cultural offerings our community has. By unifying the portal or gateway to this information a more cogent branding can take place that will make it easier and more appealing for visitors and

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local residents alike to sample the plethora of experiences Syracuse and Central New York has to offer. We want people to have the kinds of experiences that make them fall in love with our city.

STRATEGY #30

Develop a program that involves city departments, public entities, private companies, and citizens to clean up and beautify key locations in our city.

Fostering community beautification and aesthetically pleasing public places is a key component of regional success. In order to bolster pride and ownership in the community there must be significant efforts to make sure that the community is clean and pleasing to the eye. You can not be a wholly attractive and competitive city without presenting yourself as a place that people care about and take pride in.

The City's Department of Public Works has instituted full time litter pickup crews, and that is an important step. However, we still have very visible community gateways and public spaces that suffer from stray trash and debris. I believe this community is ready for a larger effort. Cities like Rochester have instituted programs where city staff, not-for-profit organizations and volunteer businesses and residents gather on special days in targeted areas to clean up those areas – together. We also need to explore how flowers, plantings and decorative lighting and signage can positively contribute to key areas. This doesn't just make a large and highly noticeable impact it also builds community and civic ownership.

While the City should be focused on creating a clean and attractive community everyday, I believe Syracusans are seeking the opportunity to get behind a coordinated effort to beautify their community. I intend to provide the leadership necessary to bring such programs to fruition.

STRATEGY #31

Revamp the Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today (TNT) program to reflect a higher level of civic engagement and increase ownership by residents of our city government.

The City of Syracuse's citizen participation program, TNT, has been in existence for over ten years now. It is a program that brings residents from eight different areas of the city together on a monthly basis to share concerns, ask questions and participate in some community planning for their neighborhood. TNT has served as a vehicle for city residents to communicate more directly with city departments and the city administration. TNT has also facilitated the creation of some visionary citizen-driven neighborhood plans which have helped in making decisions about the city's general and capital budgets. TNT has certainly created an avenue for citizen participation with City operations.

However, the TNT program has its shortcomings. TNT meetings often focus on very small-scale complaints rather than how citizens believe the city government can systematically provide better planning and better services to the neighborhoods. To a great extent, TNT has lost its original focus on planning for targeted city services in order to reach a vision for the neighborhood and the City. The City needs to provide effective infrastructure for citizens to report potholes and missing street signs, but TNT should be focused more on fundamental and sweeping neighborhood improvement and empowerment.

Concurrently, the process lacks consistency in how development projects come before TNT groups for consideration.



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Some projects come to the groups early for full consideration, some come later in the process and others never come at all. There seems to be a false sense that development projects are required to go before TNT groups for approval. This is not the case and this confusion often creates frustration among TNT participants and angst for business people.

TNT has also fallen victim to unresponsive city departments in regards to attendance and issue follow-up. When people take the time to attend a TNT meeting and their concerns go unaddressed by city staff that typically does not lead to further engagement or confidence in the TNT process or city government.

In addition, TNT groups have been given relatively little control over how any public funds are spent. While the groups do make annual recommendations to the city operating departments regarding capital budget requests and have a few thousand dollars in escrow funds they can spend on projects (for which the guidelines are ambiguous), there is not enough opportunity for real citizen influence on the budgeting process to generate any significant neighborhood activism or buy-in.

I believe that the City's citizen participation program needs to be revamped to reflect a true neighborhood council system that is predicated on very clear expectations regarding purpose, functions, staffing and outcomes. I see the passion and dedication in those that participate in TNT. We must make sure that the time and energy spent by these dedicated citizens is not done in vain, and that we are sincere in our promises to the citizens that engage in this process. This program shouldn't be about the appearance of citizen participation in government and community organizing, it should be about the real, legitimate promise of access to their government.

STRATEGY #32

Pursue innovative options for improving our parks and public spaces and providing more robust recreational offerings.

Syracuse is home to over 170 city owned and maintained parks and recreation facilities. The City Parks Department runs facilities and programs including pools, tennis and basketball courts, ice skating rinks, ball fields, golf courses, playgrounds, and trails. We are lucky to have such ample parks and recreational facilities in our city. However, we must continue to the work to maximize the value we can get out of these facilities while also finding innovative ways to fund these services.

While having the ability to find a quiet respite in our city parks is important, they must be more than open space for people to spend free time. These parks are invaluable assets with incredible potential. Quality parks and open spaces are often key factors when attracting potential residents and businesses to a community. They can also serve as drivers of educational programs especially when linked directly to school curricula. The City Parks Department must work closely with the Syracuse City School District to utilize the parks as living classrooms where students can experience hands on learning about science, history and environmental protection. These city parks can serve as invaluable educational tools that we are already maintaining.

The depth and breadth of the parks and their facilities and services is another issue. In order to provide high quality parks facilities and programming for people of all ages, while striving to



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increase offerings and opportunities for new experiences, we are facing fiscal challenges that will make this increasingly difficult. We will have to find more innovative models for providing high level services without placing excessive stress on the city budget.

The city and county should explore what arrangements might be made to share parks and recreation services to maximize investment and reduce the financial burden. Another model that may be pursued is a public-private partnership like the Syracuse Parks Conservancy. The Conservancy would be an independent not-for-profit agency that would act as a citywide parks group dedicated to raising funds and providing personal support to the maintenance and upgrading of our park facilities and programs. The Parks Conservancy is already gaining traction and may be a way that we can continue to maintain and even expand city parks facilities and offerings without putting further strain on the taxpayer. These kinds of innovative approaches and alternative models may hold the key to a sustainable parks system that serves as a major asset to our city for years and decades to come.



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